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SYNOPSIS OF COMMENTS FROM THE 2000 PUBLIC SCOPING SESSION

NPS conducted a public scoping process towards the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000 seeking comments on four locations for a potential rowing facility on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. Three of the potential sites are on NPS lands within the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The first is across from Theodore Roosevelt Island, the second between the parallel spans of the 14th Street Bridge, and the third is on Daingerfield Island. One site is not on NPS land; it is along Four Mile Run on privately owned lands at Potomac Yards. Approximately 120 separate comments were received during this process. Of these, 101 were received from individuals and 19 were from area organizations.

This Chapter provides a synopsis of the comments received and categorizes the various issues highlighted in these comments for the three sites on NPS property. Because this is a facility and site analysis, rather than a NEPA document, these comments were not specifically responded to in this study.

The comments received fall under two major categories: one, which are specific to each location, and the second, which apply to the proposed project and include issues relevant to the potential program, need and management of the proposed facility. The following are the key issues that were identified as relevant to accommodating the proposed Boathouse.

4.1 SITE SPECIFIC COMMENTS

There is significant difference in opinion regarding the preferred location of such a facility. Various strengths and weaknesses have been highlighted regarding each site, as follows:

4.1.1 Rosslyn Site, Across Theodore Roosevelt Island

Approximately 92 commentators indicated their preference for one of the four sites. Of these 67 were in favor and 25 against locating the boathouse at this site.

4.1.1.1 – Safety

There appears to be agreement amongst most comments received, that the water within this area, upstream from Memorial Bridge, offers the best weather-related protection for rowing. The narrowness of the river and the high bluffs along the Virginia shore offer protection from winds so there are greater year-round rowing opportunities. Of the approximately 66 commentators who favored the Rosslyn site, most emphasized that this was the safest site. A number of comments emphasized that rowing shells are designed for calm water use and are prone to being swamped, and that ensuring stable waters is crucial for students as there will be a number of beginners amongst their midst.

- A few of the comments highlighted that this site is closest to other rowing facilities in the vicinity (Thompson Boat Center, Potomac Boat Club, Fletchers Boathouse) and during emergency situations, would have better access to other facilities and safety support launches.
- A number of commentators indicated that, in this part of the river, above Memorial Bridge, motorized water vehicles are controlled by speed limits, which prevents excessive and dangerous washes and improves safety for rowing.

4.1.1.2 – Proximity

- Some comments highlighted that the area has close proximity to the Arlington County high schools and the rowing area on the Potomac River that is now used by the schools.
- Some commentators also indicated that they supported this site as all major rowing regattas on the Potomac River are held on this stretch of water between Fletchers Boathouse and Roosevelt Bridge.

4.1.1.3 – Transportation Access

- A few of the commentators indicated that limited access from the northbound lanes of the GWMP and a pedestrian bridge are manageable as the site would only be used by the rowers, coaches and occasionally family members of these persons.
- Some of the commentators who were against locating the boathouse here indicated that the parking area may not be large enough to accommodate trailers. In addition, traffic generated by boaters will reduce already limited parking available for visitors to Theodore Roosevelt Island and pedestrian/bike trail users.
- A few of the commentators who were in favor of locating the boathouse here indicated that parking could be built in Rosslyn and with access via the Mt. Vernon trail to TRI. Arlington County could acquire the site of the former maintenance facility in Rosslyn near North Lynn Street and Key Bridge and convert a portion of this site for parking.
- A few of the comments against locating the boathouse here indicated that emergency access was restricted to northbound GWMP only. That there may not be enough room for adequate turn-around for large fire trucks due to limited space available between GWMP and the Potomac River.
- Supporters indicated that children could take Metro to and from the site reducing



Figure 4.1: Rosslyn Site – View of Potomac River From the Potential Location

the burden on parents to shuttle them back and forth during practice.

4.1.1.4 – Environmental Issues

There were differing opinions regarding the compatibility of boathouse facilities and natural resources. These were as follow:

- A few of the commentators indicated that boathouses and rowing seem to be entirely compatible with bird habitat. One highlighted that this is visible at the Potomac Boat Club where birds are not

intimidated by the presence of rowers or coaching launches.

- A few others indicated that it is more beautiful and natural than the other sites being considered and is an ideal way to bring people in proximity with nature without detracting from the natural environment.
- Nearly all of the commentators against locating the boathouse at this location

indicated that they had preferred this area to remain in wilderness. A few indicated that in a region where natural open space is quickly diminishing, it seems extremely important to protect what little remains and is accessible to the public. This is a fabulous site for birds and other wildlife that are seldom seen in other parts of our urban areas. Putting a boathouse with constant traffic and noise nearby seems totally inappropriate for TRI. Goal should be to minimize the loss of green space and especially ecological habitat.

- A few of the commentators also highlighted that TRI was a memorial to a conservationist president – the memorial’s theme and purpose is the conservation of natural resources, and the development of the boathouse would detract the public’s enjoyment and appreciation of the memorial. Also, development in the vicinity of the Potomac Heritage Hiking Trail would be inconsistent with the theme of the trail to conserve natural and historic resources.

4.1.1.5 – Visual Condition Issues

- Some of the commentators supporting this site indicated that a beautiful boathouse such as that designed by Mr. Robert Fay would enhance the scenic value of the GWMP and TRI. One commentator went on to say that, in places like Boston and Philadelphia, many artists center their river landscapes around beautiful and quaint boathouse structures. Motorists driving along the GWMP might prefer seeing a beautiful architectural structure rather than looking

across the river to the somewhat unsightly Whitehurst Freeway.

- A few of the commentators indicated that the boathouse could be designed using “woody” or earth tone colors with new landscaping surrounding it to make the facility blend into the scenery.
- One commentator indicated that they would like to see an environmental friendly and viewer friendly building.
- A few of the commentators against locating the boathouse here indicated that such a facility would have a high visual impact due to proximity to GWMP. Also, that it would require clearing many trees.
- A few of the commentators were concerned that the existing view from the Key Bridge shows a continuous line of trees along the Potomac. That, the proposed location of the boathouse would destroy some of these trees and would detract from the view of the shoreline from the bridge, the parkway, TRI and from Georgetown.

4.1.1.6 – Cultural/Historical Issues

- Some of the commentators indicated that, in 1934, the National Capital Park and Planning Commission acquired land along the Potomac River in Rosslyn for a portion of the GWMP. The acquisition agreement included a provision that “the parties to this agreement agree that as to the location and development of a county wharf on the area so designated...” The commentators mentioned that the NPS

should live up to the letter and spirit of the agreement.

- A few of the comments highlighted that since President Roosevelt was a naturalist, and also in favor of physical fitness, one or more boathouses would be a natural interpretive addition to his legacy.

4.1.2 14th Street Bridge

Approximately 92 commentators indicated their preference for one of the four sites. Of these, eight specifically indicated their preference for the 14th Street Bridge site, 13 specifically indicated that they were against locating a boathouse here and 10 preferred this site as a second choice.

4.1.2.1 – Safety

- A number of the comments against locating the boathouse at this location indicated that the River immediately above and below this area is quite wide and offers little protection from winds, due to which, weather conditions can change rapidly. Some went on to say that conditions for rowing deteriorate especially during afternoons and the water is often not rowable for novice rowers.
- A few of the commentators also indicated that motorized vehicles are not speed-restricted in this area. That, these boats often travel at high speeds and make large wakes that can swamp a slender rowing boat. The wide area upstream of the site is a favorite area for water-skiers

and jet skis and is traveled by tour boats. All of these activities can threaten the safety of rowers, especially those using smaller shells.

- Comments against locating the boathouse at this site also voiced concern that the three bridges (the 14th Street Bridge, Metro rail Bridge, and the railroad trestle) create obstacles for crews who have to maneuver through and can face the risk of being carried against the bridge abutments.
- A few of the commentators added that, crews wanting to head upstream to more protected water would be required to cross the river below the bridges (due to the customary rules of the river) and would be vulnerable to unseen motorized traffic moving downstream through any of the other archways. This could be further compounded due to the location of the Columbia Island Marina, which is the launching area for powerboats.
- Some of the commentators also indicated that, at the Potomac Boat Club, recreational boats are not permitted to row down river from the 14th Street Bridge because of dangerous rowing conditions. That this area has a history of accidents involving both experienced and inexperienced rowers who were overcome by the sudden changes in wind waves and current that occur with the bridge pilings and widening river.
- One comment highlighted that, rowing conditions would be similar to the Alexandria Community Boathouse where



Figure 4.2: 14th Street Bridge – Potential Location

the river conditions in all but the early morning hours are often variable and un-conducive to rowing activities for all ages and skill levels. During the spring months, when the T.C. Williams High School crew is most active in preparing for their racing season, the team is prevented in practicing on the water because of weather conditions anywhere from once or twice (varsity heavy weight men) to

three times a week (varsity light weight women, who are 120 pounds). The commentator also added that, the river conditions preclude the use of smaller boats (fours, pairs, doubles, or singles) and limits the times at which adult, community boathouse members can safely use them to the early morning hours only. The commentator mentioned that coaches at the Boathouse and the

T.C. Williams High School Crew have all but given up on the idea of hosting regattas due to these conditions. As per the commentator, in a recent year, despite strong safety precautions, equipment was damaged because conditions changed rapidly during a regatta and the water went from rowable to unrowable in a matter of minutes.

- One commentator indicated that a private ferry service is anticipated to provide daily service to four locations in the core Washington area: the Pentagon, Washington Harbor in Georgetown, Maine Avenue, and the Navy Yard. This ferry service will adversely impact the rowability of the Potomac River from several of the boathouse sites. The site most impacted would be the one between the 14th Street bridges where the ferries would come into direct conflict with rowers transitioning between the boathouse and the calmer water up river from Memorial Bridge. Their hours of primary service are identical to the hours in the morning and afternoon when most rowers are afloat.

4.1.2.2 – Transportation Access

- A few of the commentators highlighted that the boathouse would require a long (3/4 mile) driveway for emergency and service access and that there may not be enough room for adequate turn-around for large fire trucks in available space between bridges, ramp and Mount Vernon Trail. One commentator indicated that the single lane road that NPS may have to construct from the Gravelly Point

Parking Lot to the boathouse for emergency and service use would destroy or reduce the size of several soccer fields that presently lie within or near its route. That, this road will also become a speedway for the existing Mount Vernon Trail users and would adversely impact the highly visible environment near the trail and the GWMP. The commentator went on to state that if such a road is needed, the NPS should widen the existing Trail so it can accommodate motor vehicular traffic, or, emergency and service vehicles should access the site by a short road that would connect directly to the boathouse from the nearby northbound GWMP.

- A few of the commentators voiced concerns that the emergency and service access is restricted to northbound GWMP.
- One commentator indicated that the distance between the parking and boathouse would require NPS to build a new parking lot closer to the boathouse.
- One commentator supporting locating the boathouse here indicated that there appears to be most amount of parking at this location.
- One commentator also suggested that impact on the existing parking lot that is directly northwest of the Navy Memorial on Columbia Island should be studied.

4.1.2.3 – Environmental Issues

- A number of persons also mentioned that the noise from low flying airplanes approaching/leaving the Reagan National Airport can be very loud in this area and can hinder communication within a boat.
- One commentator mentioned that the constant flow of vehicles over the bridges creates a resident cloud of exhaust fumes that makes the area unsuitable for outdoor athletic activity.

4.1.2.4 – Visual Condition Issues

- A few of the commentators mentioned that the boathouse would not be visible from GWMP, and would be located in an area where aesthetics are not a primary concern.
- Another commentator indicated that the site seems to be aesthetically unattractive.

4.1.3 Daingerfield Island

Approximately 92 commentators indicated their preference for one of the four sites. Of these, 10 specifically indicated their preference for the Daingerfield Island site, 22 specifically indicated that they were against locating a boathouse here

4.1.3.1 – Safety

- A number of the commentators against locating the boathouse here indicated that the site has similar issues as the 14th Street Bridge site, where the width of the

River, strong wind, and exposure to waves caused by large yachts and ferries plying the Potomac River to Washington DC are potential safety concerns.

- Other safety concerns highlighted by a few of the commentators included close proximity to sailboats and motorized boats at the Washington Sailing Marina.
- One of the commentators indicated that sheltered water conditions are limited to a cove near the Daingerfield Island Sailing Marina. That this area provides protected water circumscribed by the volume of traffic from the sailing marina including the Georgetown Sailing Team.
- A few of the commentators also indicated that recent dredging has created a channel close to the shore near the location of the Washington Sailing Marina. They mentioned that creating a boathouse next to the Marina would result in congestion due to the narrowness of the channel, and potential for accidents between the rowboats and the sailboats. The commentators indicated that rowing shells require very little water to float them, thus they do not need to be close to the channel. On the other hand, many of the sailboats at the Marina require four feet of water and so have to stay in the channel.

4.1.3.2 – Proximity

- One of the main criticism of most of the commentators against locating the boathouse here was that the site is quite a distance from the high schools in North



Figure 4.3: Daingerfield Island – Potential Location

Arlington and could take approximately 30 minutes to get to. The comments indicated that given the limited time frame high school crews have to practice (2:45 PM to 5:30 PM), such extended travel time could be extremely detrimental to their success.

4.1.3.3 – Transportation Access

- Commentators in favor of locating the boathouse here indicated that the adjacent parking area was designed to accommodate boat and trailer traffic.
- A number of commentators also indicated that the location is easily accessible from both northbound and southbound GWMP.

4.2 COMMENTS RELEVANT TO OVERALL PROJECT

The following comments highlighted issues that were not site specific but relevant to either, the need for the project, the project program and management or applicable to any of the sites.

4.2.1 Need

- A number of comments highlighted a need for additional rowing facilities in the area. One person indicated that they had been on the waiting list for a storage shelf space at the Thompson Boat Center for more than two years.
- A few of the commentators mentioned that a NPS study in 1989 recognized the need for two additional boathouses in the area.

4.2.2 Program

There were approximately 34 commentators who discussed the potential program of a boathouse.

- A number of these commentators requested NPS to use this opportunity (of providing a boathouse) to expand access to the boathouse and the river to the general public and not restrict the use of the boathouse to only Arlington Schools.
- A large number of commentators recommended providing accessibility and storage space for other forms of non-motorized boats including dragon boats, swan boats, war canoes and outriggers.

These are larger boats and need permanent housing or mooring.

- A few of the comments mentioned that there should be a plan anticipating the use of the boathouse for hosting regattas, which would require ample parking for spectators, rowers and large boat trailers, outside storage racks, restrooms and concession facilities.
- One of the comments indicated that there should be four bays for the four high school teams with sizes of bays proportionate to the actual or potential size of each high school crew team. If sizes of bays are equal, then bay size should be equal to the size needed by the largest crew team.
- A few of the comments also mentioned that there should be some office space for each crew team with sufficient phone, fax and computer lines.
- In contrast, a few of the commentators mentioned that the boathouse should be as small as possible, containing only one floor with no training or meeting space. That, it should be restricted to only rowers and house only house shells, equipment, and lockers with a small restroom. To conserve space, the boathouse should not contain showers. No new parking lots should be built and expanding existing lots should provide for parking needs.
- Some of the commentators mentioned the need for a gas pump, or fire retardant storage facilities to store gas cans that

should be located a safe distance from the boathouse.

- Some of the commentators mentioned that the TRI site could be used as a nature/interpretive center where there could be classrooms, as part of the boathouse, and talks discussing conservation/birding or other educational classes could be held.
- One of the commentators indicated that the building should be large enough to have a maximum of 150 people for short periods of time and be able to handle 40 to 50 people for daily use.
- A few of the commentators stated that the boathouse should be large enough to accommodate Arlington County high schools and selected Fairfax County schools (McLean, Langley, JEB Stuart, etc).
- One commentator mentioned that parking should be close to the launching docks so that, rowers carrying their shells on their vehicles will also be able to use the facility. That, if necessary, this could be achieved by a small launching dock near the parking area.
- One commentator indicated that existing boathouses such as Thompsons should be evaluated for expansion.
- Some comments suggested considering the inclusion of a top-floor restaurant as a convenience, to help defray ongoing costs, and to provide a great location for

people to dine while enjoying the view of the Potomac River, TRI and Georgetown.

4.2.3 Management

There were a few commentators who discussed the management of a boathouse. Two key comments were the following:

- One commentator mentioned that there should be a round-the-clock use of the parking and right-of-way for boat launching or fishing which will allow competitive boaters to train before and after work during Fall, Winter and Spring.
- Another comment mentioned that a boathouse permit on NPS property should exclude future expansion of the facility and no associated facility (restaurants, snack bars, meeting halls, etc.) should be constructed nearby.

4.2.4 Environmental Impacts

- One commentator suggested that the impact on Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and management regulations as implemented in Arlington County and the City of Alexandria should be examined. The comment mentioned that some requirements of the regulations, such as locating all non-water-dependent structures and features outside of the Resource Protection Areas, may affect site selection.

4.2.5 Alternate Sites

A few commentators offered suggestions of other sites in the area.

- One commentator suggested considering locating the boathouse between Spout Run and Windy Run with parking at the Old Woodmont School and access by the pedestrian path along Windy Run.
- Another commentator mentioned any potential sites on Georgetown waterfront, both above and below Key Bridge.
- One commentator indicated that Potomac Yards, which was an industrial/commercial area, is a logical choice and could also provide adequate space for future expansion.
- One commentator suggested using the existing marina at Columbia Island.
- One comment mentioned the NPS maintenance area on the Rosslyn side of the Parkway, near Roosevelt Island. The pedestrian bridge from the TRI parking lot leads to a trail that goes by the maintenance area. A larger pedestrian bridge could be constructed and crews could walk their boats across the parkway to docks that would be erected on the water, on the Virginia shore across from the island. The newer, larger bridge for crews walking their boats could be funded by projects such as T-21 grants.

4.2.6 Historical/Cultural Resources

- A few of the commentators against locating a boathouse on GWMP land indicated that construction of the proposed facility would destroy what little is left of the relaxed, scenic atmosphere envisioned when the GWMP was built. That, the GWMP is a National Park, and the boathouse, which might be appropriate for a County Park, is totally inappropriate for this location.

4.2.7 Aesthetics

A few of the commentators highlighted their concern regarding the design of a boathouse facility.

- One commentator mentioned that, avoid a design that looked like Thompson's Boat Center. That, look to the boathouses on boathouse row in Philadelphia or Boston for how boathouses should look like.
- Another commentator mentioned that any new structure should be in keeping with the beauty, history and significance of the GWMP.